

Exploring Instructional Strategies in an Indigenous Education Course in Initial Teacher Education

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This paper explores the different approaches and instructional strategies of five instructors who have taught a mandatory Aboriginal Education course in a Canadian teacher education program. The findings are drawn from a broader study that examined the impact of self-reflective practices in Indigenous Education. Through semi-structured interviews, five course instructors shared what they believed to be meaningful instructional strategies in the course. Although each instructor shared their personal approach to the course, the four broad themes of story, land, art, and reflection emerged from their examples. These are discussed in relation to what is reported in the literature about the approaches and instructional strategies of Indigenous Education course instructors (Aveling, 2006; Dion, 2007; McInnes, 2017); this expands the conversation on meaningful pedagogies for Indigenous Education courses in initial teacher education.

Cet article explore les différentes approches et stratégies pédagogiques de cinq instructeurs qui ont enseigné un cours obligatoire d'éducation autochtone dans le cadre d'un programme de formation des enseignants au Canada. Les résultats sont tirés d'une étude plus vaste ayant porté sur l'impact des pratiques de réflexion personnelle en éducation autochtone. Cinq instructeurs ont partagé, par des entrevues semi-structurées, ce qu'ils croyaient être des stratégies pédagogiques significatives pour le cours. Même si chaque instructeur a partagé son approche personnelle au cours, quatre grands thèmes, soit le récit, le territoire, l'art et la réflexion, sont tout de même ressortis de leurs exemples. Ces thèmes font l'objet d'une discussion portant sur les approches et les stratégies pédagogiques des instructeurs d'éducation autochtone qui sont décrites dans la littérature (Aveling, 2006; Dion, 2007; McInnes, 2017). Cette discussion vient donc élargir la conversation sur les pédagogies significatives pour les cours d'éducation autochtone offerts dans le cadre de la formation des enseignants.

The 18-hour Aboriginal Education course in Lakehead University's teacher education program was first implemented in 2003 as a mandatory course called Multicultural and Aboriginal Education. In 2008, the course narrowed to Aboriginal Education, making the program, for many years, one of the few in Canada that made Indigenous Education¹ mandatory in initial teacher education. Since its inception, the course has been taught by various instructors whose course design, instructional strategies, and required assignments were often dependent upon the instructor's personal experiences and expertise. The course is described as "Theory and strategies of appropriate education for Aboriginal students" (Lakehead University, n.d.), and course

instructors have incorporated theory on colonialism, privilege, and oppression as well as strategies for integrating Indigenous content that are appropriate for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Similar to teacher education programs elsewhere, many teacher candidates in the course are non-Indigenous, requiring course instructors to determine which instructional strategies are most meaningful in developing non-Indigenous students' understanding of the issues and perspectives within Indigenous Education (Aveling, 2006; Cannon, 2012; Dion, 2007; Iseke-Barnes, 2008; McInnes, 2017).

Highlighted in this paper are the different approaches and instructional strategies of five instructors who taught the Aboriginal Education course at Lakehead University's teacher education program. Drawn from a broader study of self-reflective practices in the Aboriginal Education course, the focus on the approach of each instructor adds to the limited literature on Indigenous Education courses in teacher education, and is the only study known to explore multiple instructors' perspectives on, and teaching practices in, an Indigenous Education course. Although each instructor shared their approach to teaching the course, I have categorized the four broad themes emerged from the findings as *story*, *land*, *art*, and *reflection*. This paper concludes with a discussion situating each theme in the literature. These four themes and the experiences of the five course instructors provide further possibilities on appropriate and meaningful ways of providing teacher candidates with issues and perspectives on Indigenous Education in initial teacher education.

Context

I am a White educator whose scholarly work has focused on best practices and methods for non-Indigenous educators to learn to develop culturally appropriate and meaningful teaching practices for Indigenous students in northern Ontario First Nations communities (Oskineegish, 2014, 2015). Building on the findings from previous work, I developed a study that investigated the impact of self-reflection on teacher candidates' understanding of teaching Indigenous students and integrating culturally appropriate Indigenous content. Though self-reflection remained central to the findings, it became evident that self-reflection was entwined with a variety of instructional approaches and practices. The responses that course instructors provided on the instructional strategies that they believed were meaningful were extensive, and it became evident that discussing these results on their own could provide insight into the types of instructional practices that are utilized in Indigenous Education in initial teacher preparation courses. This study examines pedagogies in the mandatory Aboriginal Education course at Lakehead University. In 1982, Section 35(2), Part II of the Canadian *Constitution Act* defined the term "Aboriginal" as including First Nation, Métis, and Inuit of Canada. In more recent years, the federal government has shifted its terminology from "Aboriginal" to "Indigenous" following the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007). In this paper, the term Indigenous is used except in reference to the Aboriginal Education course title or in participant quotations.

Literature Review

The study was guided by the theoretical framework of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) for Indigenous students (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Hammond, 2015; Maguire & McAlpine, 1996; McMillian, 2013; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The foci of story, land, art, and reflection were explored

as potential approaches for preparing teacher candidates to develop a pedagogy that accurately reflected Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories, and perspectives. They align with the principles of CRT, which is an approach to formal education that seeks to improve the educational experience and outcome of Indigenous students by utilizing teaching methods, curriculum, and school policies that are relevant and responsive to Indigenous students, their families, and communities (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 1998; Kahontawkas, 2012). CRT originated from multicultural education scholars who argued that schools, which operate primarily from White, middle-class cultural frameworks, failed to provide educational policies, programs, and practices that reflect the cultural background and ways of learning of African American, Latinx, and Indigenous students (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas, 1988), resulting in widespread underachievement that has clear divisions in class and cultural heritage as to who benefits from schools and who does not (Howard, 2003).

Some scholars have critiqued CRT and other culture-based theories associating cultural difference with student failure (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Schmeichel, 2012; St. Denis, 2009). They contend that the focus on cultural differences echoes previous educational anthropologists' work in the 1950s and 60s that viewed cultural difference as a disadvantage. These early research findings on the culture of students of colour were always in comparison to the position of White middle-class culture as the norm (Schmeichel, 2012). A student's heritage, ethnicity, cultural affiliation, and socio-economic status were thought to be the cause of the student's difficulties in schools. This belief not only placed White middle-class culture as the norm but also relieved educational institutions of any responsibility for the resulting inequalities in schools (St. Denis, 2009).

In response, some scholars have suggested that a critical examination of racism and classism with CRT would help to understand how racism and classism affect the structure, policies, and practices of current schooling (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Schmeichel, 2012; St. Denis, 2009). A pairing of CRT with critical race theory is thought to bring attention to the effects of racism, in addition to challenging "the hegemonic practices of White supremacy as masked by a carefully (re)produced system of meritocracy" (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p. 70). In reference to Indigenous Education, St. Denis (2009) explained that cross-cultural training that is void of anti-racism education "often has the effect of encouraging the belief that the cultural difference of the Aboriginal 'Other' is the problem" (p. 178), an outcome that ultimately goes against the central purpose of CRT and Indigenous Education.

There is a growing awareness that Indigenous students need, and deserve, to be educated by teachers who are responsive to, and respectful of, Indigenous histories, cultures, and perspectives (Goulet, 2001; Labone, Cavanagh, & Long, 2014; Lewthwaite, Owen, Doiron, McMillan, & Renaud, 2013; Moon, 2014; Nishnawbe Aski Nation, 2012; Pashagumskum, 2014). Of equal importance is providing non-Indigenous students with an accurate representation of Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories, and perspectives (Dion, 2009; Friesen & Friesen, 2002; Kanu, 2006; Toulouse, 2016). Not every Indigenous Education instructor explicitly promoted culturally responsive education in their instructional practices in teacher education programs. However, the goal of improving and transforming teachers' knowledge of, and relationship to, Indigenous students and communities is present, with many instructors pointing to initial teacher education as the place to foster such transformation (Blimkie, Vetter, & Haig-Brown, 2014; Milne, 2017; Nardozi, Restoule, Broad, Steele, & James, 2014).

The literature on the integration of Indigenous content and perspectives in initial teacher education continues to grow (Armstrong, 2013; Blimkie et al., 2014; Cannon, 2012; Kovach, 2013;

Labone et al., 2014; Mashford-Pringle & Nardozi, 2013; Nardozi et al, 2014; Tupper, 2011; Vetter & Blimkie, 2011), and yet, there remains a need for research on teacher education courses focusing specifically on Indigenous Education (Aveling, 2006; Cannon, 2012; Dion, 2007; Iseke-Barnes, 2008; Scully, 2012; McInnes, 2017). In teacher education programs and graduate education courses, the content and strategies shared by instructors focus on privilege, oppression, and identity (e.g., Cannon, 2012; Iseke-Barnes, 2008), as well as on the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and communities (Aveling, 2006; Dion, 2007; Scully, 2012; McInnes, 2017). Learning activities have included talking circles, guest speakers, field-trips, and required texts by Indigenous authors. Instructional strategies are also used to connect teacher candidates' personal knowledge and experiences with course content and theory. The connection between teacher candidates' knowledge and experience with course content has shown that teacher candidates' growth in knowledge and understanding can be challenging and slow. As Aveling (2006) noted, she had to begin where students were at in their initial understanding of Indigenous content and relationships, and not necessarily where she wishes they were.

Most literature on Indigenous Education courses are authored by the instructors themselves and offer first-person accounts of their approach and course content; likewise, this paper provides a view of five instructors' instructional approaches to the same Aboriginal Education course, extending the conversation on effective instructional strategies for Indigenous Education courses in initial teacher education.

Methodology and Methods

This paper discusses findings that derived from one of the qualitative methods within a larger mixed methods study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010) that examined self-reflective practices within Indigenous Education courses in teacher education. Even though both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the broader study, they were not used equally; a quantitative survey was utilized in two Aboriginal Education courses that provided complimentary findings for the larger qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, referred to as an embedded mixed design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The qualitative and quantitative approaches were kept separate and used in complementary ways (Creswell, 2010). The following describes the qualitative methods and analysis utilized in the study.

The findings in this paper stem from semi-structured interviews (Kovach, 2009; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) with the five course instructors. Prior to the interviews taking place, I participated in two Aboriginal Education courses as a participant-as-observer. The term *participant-as-observer* differs from participant-observer because the role of participant-as-observer involves more than observing; they participate actively as their position of researcher is known to the group (Aloha & Lucas, 1981; Babchuk, 1962; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002; Kawulich, 2005). My role in the courses provided me with a better understanding of what teacher candidates experienced in each session of the course, and solidified the guiding questions that I provided to the past and present course instructors. Course instructors were asked eleven questions about their teaching background of the Aboriginal Education course; their perception of teacher candidates' knowledge and awareness of Indigenous histories, cultures, and perspectives completing the course; and the instructional strategies utilized in the course. The three specific questions that instructors responded to about instructional strategies were: *As an instructor did you include reflective assignments or strategies in the classes? What specific strategies and/or assignments do you believe had the greatest impact on teacher candidates' understanding and attitudes*

towards Indigenous education? and, drawing from your experience teaching, what is the most important aspect of preparing teacher candidates on this topic?

The guiding questions were provided prior to the interviews to allow instructors time to think about their responses. I sought to elicit descriptions of the instructional strategies that instructors perceived supported their students' learning experiences in the course. Their responses are the focus of this paper.

In the past decade, approximately 18 instructors—including those who only did so once—have taught the Aboriginal Education course. The criteria for course instructors to participate in this study were that they had taught recently and for more than one semester. Although six instructors met the criteria and were invited to participate via email, only five instructors agreed to participate. The interviews began in February 2017 and were completed in March 2017. Two interviews were conducted in person and three by telephone, each lasting between one and two hours. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with a copy of the transcription sent to participants by email for member checking (Creswell, 2014). Four participants responded and two made changes and additions that clarified their interview responses. Transcripts were coded in ATLAS.ti. (v. 8.1), a qualitative software program. The transcripts were coded for key words, themes, or patterns (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) that emerged from course instructors' responses to meaningful instructional strategies and assignments. A small thank you gift was provided to all participants for their time in the study.

Limitations in using qualitative semi-structured interviews include researcher bias in the development of the interview questions and in the analysis (Creswell, 2014). My own personal beliefs, opinions, background knowledge, and comfort level may have influenced the questions and the participants' responses during the interviews. To ensure trustworthiness, I attempted to maintain a transparent research process as I situated myself throughout the research development, process, and analysis (Butler-Kisber, 2010). In the findings section, I include a brief biography and statement of my prior experiences and interactions with each instructor. Each instructor had a wealth of experience and knowledge to share about teaching the Aboriginal Education course; the condensed narratives in this paper highlight their work and are intended as a celebration of the diversity of instructional strategies and assignments useful to Indigenous Education instructors in initial teacher education.

Research Ethics

Prior to the interviews, all of the instructors were provided a consent form approved by the ethics board at Lakehead University that asked them to choose if they want to be identified or anonymous in the findings of the study. All of the instructors indicated that they would like to be identified. One instructor asked that I check with them prior to any publications with their name identified—I agreed. I provided a copy of this paper for review to four of the instructors who provided further feedback prior to submitting this paper for publication. One of the instructors was not available for an additional review. All instructors provided consent to their name appearing in the study and in publications.

Findings

Each instructor had their own unique instructional purpose and approach to course design. The following is a brief description of the instructional strategies that instructors shared with me. The

descriptions are presented in the order of the scheduled interviews. A discussion on the similarities and differences in instructional strategies, and how they compare to what is found in the literature follows the findings section.

Instructor: Dr. Paul Cormier

Dr. Paul Cormier is an instructor from the Red Rock Indian Band who has extensive experience working as a cross-cultural facilitator. He had taught eight sections of the course at the time of the interview. As part of the broader study, I took the position of participant-as-observer (Babchuk, 1962; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002) in two sections of Aboriginal Education taught by Paul that allowed me to gain first-hand experience of the course content, Paul's pedagogy, and students' perception of the course. I interviewed Paul in-person after the end of the course. Paul continues to teach graduate and undergraduate Indigenous Education courses in Lakehead University's Faculty of Education. During our conversation about meaningful assignments and instructional strategies, he described the importance of cultivating an open and safe learning environment where everyone is encouraged to share their perspectives. He said:

I try to help frame things in a way so that it's not 'us versus them,' or 'White people have done so many bad things to Native people.' I really try to stay away from those kinds of things and present it in a way so that people understand it's all points of view and the truth is somewhere in the middle.

Paul strategically communicates with teacher candidates in ways that encourages them to think about and identify personal perspectives about Indigenous people, culture, or issues in education. He then asks teacher candidates to think about how their personal experiences have shaped their perspectives:

I really try to make sure students understand that my point of view, like theirs, is based on my experiences. If they don't have experiences with Native people, it's not their fault. I really try to help them understand that it's not about blaming. It's not about trying to say 'you're racist because you don't know anything about Native people.' I try to make sure that they understand that all of this is based on your history and the way that you were brought up, [and] where you lived.

Paul knows that many of the teacher candidates who enter initial teacher education are non-Indigenous with little knowledge of Indigenous Education. He manages to draw out teacher candidates' knowledge and perspectives by building trust in the classroom. One of the ways he does this is by sharing personal stories about his own learning experiences. He explained:

I really try to choose my words carefully, [and] I really try to make students feel very comfortable. I try to relate to them as a teacher because I was a teacher.... I share a lot of personal stories because I think being personal has a greater impact on people, and I was very ignorant when I grew up because I grew up in a very small town. So, I understand that experience is what changes you.

By establishing an open learning environment, he encourages teacher candidates to ask questions, even those they would normally feel uncomfortable asking.

Class activities varied and included two reflection papers, non-traditional sharing circles, and land-based activities guided by local Indigenous Elders or community members. He explained that he frames his course around using definitions of "perspective and perspectivism." He said:

I want the students to be able to reflect on where their thoughts come from and where their feelings come from about Aboriginal people, and so it's tied into the course. And then the final assignment, I want them to explain how they've grown and learned over the course. So, I ask them to reflect again.

Reflection is central to Paul's course design. In his final assignment, he asked teacher candidates to write a letter as they would to apply for a job and explain how their knowledge increased or changed over the course, and how this will help them in their job. Through the various learning activities in the course, he hoped to encourage teacher candidates to be reflective practitioners. He explained: "When they are a teacher and they are selecting teaching materials, they ask themselves, 'what point of view do those materials come from?' and [they can] reflect on that and reflect on their words." He further added,

If you are teaching something and the student has a visceral reaction to it, then you notice it; you have to think and reflect on that all of the time. To me, that is pedagogy and making sure that the content that we are delivering is sensitive but also the way we are delivering it is sensitive. So, I have them think about that throughout the whole course and I consciously did that at the beginning when I designed it because as a teacher, I believe in modeling what I am saying, so I try to demonstrate that in the class.

In response to what instructional strategy or assignment had the greatest impact, Paul noted that most teacher candidates appreciated the activities that took them outside and out onto the land. The land-based learning activities included nature walks guided by an Elder who shared stories and knowledge about traditional uses of the plants that surround Lakehead University. Even though self-reflection was clearly a prominent aspect of Paul's instructional strategies, it was also coupled with establishing a safe learning environment where all teacher candidates could feel comfortable sharing their perspectives, and an experiential learning environment in which teacher candidates had the opportunity to have first-hand experience participating in cultural practices.

Instructor: Dr. Lolehawk Laura Buker

I interviewed Dr. Lolehawk Laura Buker by phone. Laura is an Indigenous instructor who identifies as Stó:lō (people of the river), and with her grandmother whose family comes from up in the great salmon corridor of northern British Columbia in the Lake Babine Nation territory. Laura taught 40 to 50 sections of the Aboriginal Education course over a period of nine or ten years. I had the opportunity to sit-in two of Laura's classes prior to data collection. Dr. Lolehawk's instructional approach towards the course was deliberate, she said:

I worked toward building relationships, and I used words that were encompassing and inclusive. I use those deliberately, because I'm sure they weren't hearing them too many other places, [and I did] anything that we have to do in terms of building a compassionate heart towards history and also a thoughtful mind.

Laura often used the word "invite" when she spoke about teaching. She would tell teacher candidates that

You are going to be out in classrooms with Indigenous ... children or youth in them, and the words that you use to invite people into discovery and exploration and understanding has to have the right kind of

language that is inclusive, that makes people feel empowered and ... respected.

Laura sought to create the type of teacher-student interaction and classroom learning environment that she asked of teacher candidates. She invited teacher candidates to feel that the course was a safe space to ask tough or embarrassing questions. She mentioned beginning the course with an exploration of the term *Aboriginal worldview*, explaining that this conversation made Aboriginal worldviews visible, showed how diverse they are, and made clear how worldviews are the “foundation of anything and everything that is Indigenous Education.” After setting the stage for respectful and deep conversations on Aboriginal worldviews, Laura moved on to important issues such as the Residential School system. Cautioning that these conversations did not happen right away, she said

It took some time. We would work through what Indigenous worldview and perspectives meant and I made sure it was enriched with curriculum. For instance, they walked in every week and there would be some sort of cool Métis or Aboriginal music playing as they came in, and I would also put up on the big screen some art from an artist they may not have seen before, for example, a painting, a drawing, or a carving. So, every part of walking into that space was welcoming and enriching. It wasn't just walking in and opening up a book and here we go, I wanted them to really experience how they could create something. But they would have to experience ... how welcoming a space can be, and also how to move from that introductory place, to what it looks like to have such a diverse and rich experience with Aboriginal languages, cultures, and worldviews from all different territories.

Laura taught about the Canadian Indian Residential Schools system using multiple learning resources that included Residential School survivors' stories, media, and websites such as *Where are the Children*, and later, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2012) interim report. Her approach was to bring in first-hand accounts; as one example, she would read aloud the first ten or twelve pages of Shirley Stirling's (1992) autobiographic book, *My Name is Seepeetza*. By bringing in first-hand accounts of Residential Schools, Laura found that teacher candidates “could really feel the empathy of what [was] needed.” She explained that many teacher candidates were shocked to learn that the Residential School system was driven by government policy. Recognizing the emotional impact, she would end sessions with time “where we could breathe in and breathe out about the hopefulness of moving forward.” Laura noted that teacher candidates needed various supports when engaging in difficult and emotional learning topics and issues.

Laura utilized numerous strategies and assignments throughout her time teaching the course. She would regularly invite local Elders to come and visit with the class, hold roundtable focus group discussions on how to incorporate Indigenous worldview into various teaching subjects, and read aloud Indigenous stories, such as *The Animal People Choose A Leader*, written by Ojibwe author Richard Wagamese (2011), in the edited book by Mishene and Toulouse. She also developed an assignment that had teacher candidates create a short two-minute film in small groups on a topic of their choice. Laura felt the strategies and assignments that had the greatest impact on teacher candidates were anything built on stories. She said:

I think two things; one is the power of story and the power of the stories of the land. How the students made the connection that everything in Aboriginal worldview no matter which territory you are on is connected.... The other was the digital media, being able to see the film, and be moved by visuals that they created and be empowered by that.

In conversation about self-reflection in the course, Laura explained that self-reflection was embedded through many aspects of her course design:

Every one of those projects always had a reflective component to it. They always had to tie it up. We were going to look at a question or explore something, we're going to think about it deeply, and then once we thought about that, we would dig deeper. That was the actual word, 'dig deeper'. So you know they would go to a surface answer and I would say 'dig deeper', and then we would discuss and reflect. 'What is all of this leading to?' 'How does this have meaning for you?' 'How is this relevant and important?' So the whole strategy of reflection was engrained in everything: we practiced together, explored together, and put together for their evaluation projects.

The concept of self-reflection used in conjunction with other important strategies is repeated in Laura's examples of teaching. Self-reflection is important, but equally important is establishing a learning environment that is conducive to reflection.

Instructor: Lex Scully

I interviewed Lex Scully, a non-Indigenous woman of Celtic heritage, over the phone. At the time of the interview, Lex was a PhD candidate who had taught 17 sections of Aboriginal Education at Lakehead University's Thunder Bay and Orillia campuses. Prior to our interview, Lex's written perspectives on teaching the Aboriginal Education course (Scully, 2012) influenced my literature review and the development of this study. During our conversation about self-reflection, Lex explained that one of her first assignments in the course had teacher candidates investigate and identify the treaty and traditional territory of a place that they felt a personal connection with in their life. She found this assignment helped teacher candidates to become "more aware of how they were already in relation with Indigenous people and territory." Place-based education and critical reflection are central to her course design. When asked what strategies or assignments she believed had the greatest impact on teacher candidates, she described an activity that combined place-based learning with critical reflection:

In Orillia we often go to the Fish Fence, and the Fish Fence is underneath a highway bridge that most of the students travel along every day. And most of the students say 'wow I never knew this was here before.'

At the Fish Fence, Mnkikaning, at what is currently known as the Atherley Narrows, the class learns from the Keeper of the Fish Fence, Elder Mark Douglas of Chippewas of Rama/Mnjikaning. He asks teacher candidates to think about the history of the land. Lex said: "It's also important to ask [teacher candidates] to reflect, to be reflective about where they are, whose land it is, how is it related to how they used to move around the place - all that kind of stuff."

Similar to Paul Cormier and Laura Buker, Lex found that teacher candidates often identified learning on the land or with community members as the learning experiences they felt were the most impactful. In a final assignment in the course, she asked teacher candidates to pick two experiences to reflect on and share. She described it as follows:

I wanted them to pick two experiences that they had over the term and tell me how that impacted their self-concept as an educator who had a responsibility to teach with and about FNMI communities. And without fail, I'm going to say its pretty close to 100% of the people identified a time that we were on the

land and then a time when a community member came into the class as having significantly affected their ability to see themselves as capable of teaching that material or that concept.

Throughout her course design, she indicated that critical thought and reflection were important. She emphasized the importance of including conversations about White privilege and said providing teacher candidates with assignments or instructional strategies that are a type of cultural appreciation is not enough. She began these conversations by telling her class about her responsibility to Indigenous Canadians:

I as a Canadian citizen, my house, my education, my well-being, and the choices I am able to make are all a result of natural resource extraction on stolen Indigenous land. I have a responsibility to make sure that there is equity in terms of the way that that wealth is shared out and right now there isn't.

She would also tell teacher candidates that: "I think education has a really important part of creating a critical map of Canada that is big enough so that these systems can change in a way that it can benefit Indigenous peoples' resurgence and sovereignty."

Acknowledging that discussions of White privilege, oppression, and systematic racism in our schools and our everyday life can be difficult for some teacher candidates, she explained that as a White instructor it is imperative that she facilitates these conversations:

As a White instructor of that course I have two jobs. One of my jobs is to model that I am implicated in all these processes and I have a responsibility as a treaty partner, as a Canadian citizen to fight for equity and fight for justice in terms of how that wealth is shared out. And also, my other job is to show that I am not to be an expert in Indigenous culture and Indigenous people but that I can model having good relationships with communities. That there are people who it is their role to come and be that for the class.

Lex's instructional strategy combines decolonization (Donald, 2009) with experiential place-based teaching (Gruenewald, 2003; Scully 2012). She models discussions of decolonization by sharing her own awareness of the inherent privileges as a White instructor.

Instructor: Dolores Wawia

Dolores Wawia, also known as "Frog Lady," is a retired professor from Gull Bay First Nation. Dolores taught the course from its inception until her recent retirement. I interviewed Dolores in-person at Lakehead University. In 2004, I was a teacher candidate in one of the courses that she taught. During the interview, she shared with me that she knew that non-Indigenous teachers needed to learn about teaching Indigenous students from her experience working with teachers in different schools. She shared the following story:

I started visiting classes in 1975 and talking about the contributions of Native people in Ontario; they didn't all live in teepees, build totem poles, and ride horses—that was their stereotype! They all had different jobs, and different things. I started talking to them all and I visited lots of classrooms. Teachers were happy to have me come in for an hour and do their work and I could see the enthusiasm of the children, from grade 1 to 8. But the teachers still had misunderstandings.

Knowing that more was needed, and with support of the Faculty of Education Dean, mandatory

courses on Indigenous Education were introduced at Lakehead University's teacher education program.

Dolores created a visual map for me of her course outline that had the words Aboriginal Education in the centre and five headings surrounding it. The headings included introduction, communications techniques, diversity of Indigenous peoples, philosophies, and test. After her introduction, she would discuss important communication techniques, explaining that many non-Indigenous teachers needed to understand the different ways that Indigenous students learn. For example, she explained that when a student is uncomfortable with direct eye contact, it is important for teachers to remember that the student may still be listening, watching, and learning. Teachers do not have to force students to behave in a manner that is uncomfortable for them, but instead can develop an awareness of the many ways that students learn.

Dolores also spoke about the importance of humour in the classroom: "Humour is used to stave off embarrassment, make fun, laugh at yourself, poke jokes at yourself." She said that humour can help with shyness or to "correct inappropriate behaviour." When teachers are unaware of other cultural communication norms it can create a cultural mismatch between teacher and student. In Dolores's personal teaching experience, she has witnessed this cultural mismatch occur many times between non-Indigenous teachers and Indigenous students. She modeled these different types of communication techniques through the use of storytelling. She said:

I use those techniques in my teaching, in storytelling, by example, and the work that they have to do. Sometimes they think, geez you know this course is only worth a quarter why do we have to do so much work? I said: 'That's how you are going to learn, that's how you'll learn from me, and that's why you do it.'

It was evident from Dolores's stories that she believed in providing teacher candidates with as much knowledge as she could about the diversity of Indigenous peoples. In her classes, she would discuss the difference between status and non-status, urban and community, and the difference between First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples and communities. As I listened to Dolores share her stories, I felt she emphasized that teacher candidates must not make assumptions about Indigenous students, but instead, should get to know how Indigenous cultures impact students in school.

Dolores did not use the term reflection specifically in her responses, and yet, a part of her course outline was on teacher candidates' personal philosophies. She said that philosophy includes "Your motives, why you motivate children, and how you can motivate children." She added that "You find ways to motivate children through your own techniques, and your beliefs in life." This approach resonates with the principles of self-reflection (Tann, 1993).

Dolores utilized stories and storytelling as her primary approach to the course. She said that she shared many of her personal stories with teacher candidates and encouraged teacher candidates to share their stories too.

Instructor: Dr. Sandra Wolf

Dr. Sandra Wolf is Anishinaabe from Turtle Mountain in North Dakota. I interviewed Sandra over the phone because she had recently retired. She taught 12 sections of the course between 2007 and 2016. I had only met Sandra a few times at Lakehead University prior to this study. We made

time prior to our interview for informal conversations to develop a comfort and familiarity with each other. Sandra is the only instructor in this study who originated from the United States. She saw her role as course instructor differently due to her position as “a visitor to Canada.” She explained:

I did not have a relationship with the students that could be clearly demarked as expert-novice. We were not one expert and 40 novices, because I was a visitor to Canada. So, we could turn almost any activity into something self-reflective because I was not bashful at all about asking them, ‘Well, what do you think? How does this work for you?’

In discussions about self-reflection, Sandra referred to an instructional activity that she often used in class called Take a Stand. She would post four signs in four different locations in the classroom, each with a different level of agreement. She would read four statements to teacher candidates based on a newspaper article or book. Each person would have to get up and relocate to a sign that indicated, “I agree,” “I disagree,” “I need more information,” or “I would like to rephrase the statement.” She would ask, “What is the basis for your agreement?” And teacher candidates would have the opportunity to share their perspective and ideas. She explained that “There were absolutely no right or wrong answers. All opinions expressed were valid. This activity gave students an opportunity to speak in class, to articulate an opinion that no one could discount. And they could revise their opinion at any point.” Similar to other instructors in this study, Sandra described the emphasis on promoting intercultural ideas and perspectives in her instruction. Sandra employed a variety of assignments and strategies in her teaching; however, the two assignments that she said remained staples in her courses were the development of a 15-minute one-act play and the creation of a timeline of events in Canadian history related to Indigenous Education. In the creation of the timeline, teacher candidates decided the first and last date and would add events in-between those dates that they believed to be important and relevant. She noticed that teacher candidates would be creative and decide what events were important and why.

The development of the 15-minute one-act play required teacher candidates to find primary sources from “Indian Affairs, or reports that were written by the superintendents of the schools, and also Hudson Bay Post records,” and students would create their own interpretation from those sources. Sandra elaborated on the impact of primary sources as opposed to secondary sources, saying

The use of primary sources rather than secondary sources has some positive influences on the way students view the data they have found. From the series of historical school reports maintained by the Indian Department, for example, month to month patterns start to emerge regarding the number of children who died of influenza or died of other causes. Were parents notified? Where were the children buried? If the Aboriginal Education students read in a secondary source, a textbook, for example, that children died in Residential Schools, the impact and the character of life in a Residential School are not nearly as apparent.

The development of the one-act play was a readers’ theatre that used minimal sets and costumes. And yet, she found that the process of taking primary sources and creating plays had the greatest impact on teacher candidates’ “attitudes and understanding.” Sandra explained that “there is something about arts-based education, in general, and in drama, in particular, that allows and encourages empathy and the capacity to move outside of the individual’s typical

cultural boundaries.” The plays were so well received that Sandra said it inspired some teacher candidates to share them with others. She said that some teacher candidates would ask other professors to come and watch their plays or perform them outside of the classroom:

On more than one occasion, students would say, ‘Let’s not just do this in the classroom. Why can’t we use the stage in the auditorium?’ So, one term we used the stage and we served a small potluck buffet; the students wanted to do that. The students presented their one-act plays, presented them to their classmates and some invited guests and served the buffet afterwards.

The development of a one-act 15-minute play from primary sources would typically take a considerable amount of time, as Sandra noted that many teacher candidates would start “from the most basic of understanding.” And yet, the use of arts-based learning created a learning environment that promoted reflection, critical thought, and imagination.

Discussion

The five instructors in this study provided multiple examples of instructional strategies used in the Aboriginal Education course. During analysis of the interviews, the themes of story, land, art, and reflection emerged from their examples. It was evident that providing teacher candidates with theory and strategies appropriate to the issues and perspectives of Indigenous Education was a priority for each instructor, yet the instructional strategies employed seemed as significant as the information itself. Not all of the instructors used story, land, art, or reflection in their course design, but with each of these strategies described by more than one participant, they are worth exploring as meaningful instructional approaches for Indigenous Education courses.

Story

In the narratives of each instructor, the use of story as pedagogy is evident, something found strongly in Archibald (2008). Their use of personal stories made explicit their epistemologies and pedagogies to teacher candidates in the course. Lex Scully, the only non-Indigenous instructor in this study, took time in her course to share her personal story and her position as a White educator and a Settler in Canada. She established the type of critical examination of race, privilege, and oppression that she expected from teacher candidates in the course. The Indigenous instructors shared stories to assist teacher candidates in understanding issues in education from Indigenous perspectives. Both Laura Buker and Dolores Wawia heavily relied on stories throughout their instruction. Dolores primarily shared her personal stories, and Laura integrated personal stories and other peoples’ stories through media, legends, and autobiographies by Indigenous authors.

The use of stories, for all instructors, enhanced their instruction and provided a method for teacher candidates to connect with course content by sharing their own stories in response. The multiple ways in which story was incorporated resonates with literature on Indigenous Education course instruction (Aveling, 2006; Dion, 2007; McInnes, 2017). The use of story in this study is perceived as a meaningful method for non-Indigenous teacher candidates to learn from Indigenous communities and perspectives. Stories create a bridge to connect and compare their experiences and understanding with the perspectives offered in the course (Aveling, 2006). Since most teacher candidates are non-Indigenous with limited knowledge of and experience with Indigenous communities, course instructors draw on stories to bring Indigenous communities

and perspectives into the classroom. Though each instructor used story differently, the overall purposes were similar.

Land

The emphasis of land, either through experiential land-based learning or place-based learning, was primarily discussed by Lex Scully, Laura Buker, and Paul Cormier. During the interviews, all three instructors spoke about the importance of taking teacher candidates out of the classroom to learn about, and from, the land that surrounds them. For example, learning local and traditional uses of plants, and landmarks from the local Indigenous perspectives. In a published article, Lex Scully (2012) refers to this type of learning as place-based learning. She explained that

Places are the literal common ground. Exposing the ways that a different experience of a place and the signifiers that make meaning out of place can create rich dialogue and understanding across perspectives. A complex and rich understanding of place can change the view from where one is standing. (p. 152)

In Lex's courses, she included field trips to local landmarks to identify and reflect on different perspectives and the significance of places in Thunder Bay and Orillia. Places students may have walked past numerous times were now being explored from an Indigenous perspective. This provided teacher candidates with the opportunity to increase their awareness and understanding of the relationships between people and land, as well as relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the community.

Paul Cormier incorporated land-based learning differently, as he arranged for a local Elder to facilitate a nature walk on the land surrounding Lakehead University and to discuss how plants are used as medicines. Teacher candidates were given the opportunity to explore plants from an Indigenous persons' perspective. In Laura Buker's class, teacher candidates were encouraged to explore land and place that surrounded them as part of their iMovie assignments. In all three examples, land was seen as source of knowledge. Learning from land and community is described by Dion (2007) and McInnes (2017) who both, in very different ways, emphasized the importance of providing teacher candidates with knowledge of the Indigenous community that surrounds them. Most often, initial teacher education courses are relatively short, creating logistical challenges for instructors to arrange for learning experiences outside of the classroom. Still, both Paul Cormier and Laura Buker recommended that Indigenous Education courses should continue to look for more ways that teacher candidates can learn through experiential land-based approaches.

Art

Another theme that emerged was the use of art and arts-based learning projects. Both Sandra Wolf and Laura Buker drew upon art and arts-based learning in their instructional strategies throughout the entire course. Although Sandra described the timeline and one-act play assignment as staples in her courses, she also shared with me other assignments that all had an art component, such as the creation of fictional letters or dioramas. Laura also frequently used art in her class. She shared that she would often play music or display artwork by Indigenous artists at the beginning of the class as a way of enriching the classroom with different forms of Indigenous

representation. In Dion's (2007) description of her instruction of an Indigenous course, she also incorporated poetry, visual art, and films by Indigenous artists. Although Dion incorporated artistic work by Indigenous authors and artists, the focus on artistic expression was not found to be explicitly described in literature in other Indigenous Education courses. Sandra and Laura incorporated assignments that asked teacher candidates to share their knowledge through artistic expression as they wanted teacher candidates to engage with course material in a deeper and more meaningful way. It was clear that they believed that a part of their task as instructors was to utilize instructional strategies and assignments that could reach teacher candidates' hearts and minds, and that incorporating art and artistic expression was one way to do that.

Reflection

The use of reflection was discussed by all instructors. It was the only instructional strategy that was specifically asked about in the interviews. Whether reflection was used independently or in relation to other strategies, most course instructors used reflection as a way for teacher candidates to receive new information, question prior beliefs or assumptions, and most importantly, engage with course material on a personal level. In Paul's course, reflection was the foundation of the course with specific assignments that asked teacher candidates to think about their personal perspectives in relation to the topics and issues addressed in the course. Laura, Lex, Dolores, and Sandra embedded reflection throughout the course, asking teacher candidates to be reflective about their personal position and connection to course content—a use of reflection that mirrors Aveling (2006) and Dion's (2007) instructional strategies. For all of the instructors, the use of reflection was often in combination with story, land, or art, with the purpose of eliciting deeper thought, critique, and discussions about Indigenous Education. The combination of strategies echoes other Indigenous Education course instructors (Aveling, 2006; Dion, 2007; Iseke-Barnes, 2008; McInnes, 2017), as each tried to find ways to provide knowledge of Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories, and perspectives, as well as to open hearts to untangle and dismantle the negative stereotypes and prejudices towards Indigenous peoples in Canada.

What is most evident from each instructor is that Indigenous Education courses are not simply courses on history and theory; they are conversations about the events and relationships that have impacted and continue to impact people's lives. The use of story, land, art, and reflection are identified as meaningful strategies for preparing teacher candidates to teach Indigenous students, and to work with, and integrated Indigenous content. Though each instructor's course content differed, the overall aim of each instructor resonated with McInnes (2017), a Native American instructor, who wrote that

My hope was to create a safe space for the exchange of intercultural ideas, the deconstruction of stereotypes, the development of required knowledge and skills, and an opportunity for everyone to positively learn about Indigenous peoples and celebrate our collective diversity. (p. 150)

Creating a learning space, instructional strategies, and learning activities that were most meaningful was an aim that was evident in the five course instructors in this study.

Conclusion

Indigenous Education courses in initial teacher education are tasked with an almost impossible

objective. This objective is to (a) provide teacher candidates with knowledge, facts, and information on Indigenous histories and cultures, and the impact of non-Indigenous colonization and assimilation; (b) identify and break down stereotypes, myths, and deeply rooted prejudices; and (c), provide the skills and resources to develop appropriate lessons and pedagogical practices throughout their teaching career. Despite this seemingly in-surmountable task, many Indigenous Education instructors have taken up the challenge and have offered courses that they hope resonate with teacher candidates. As part of this challenge, instructors require awareness, understanding and deliberate support from the leadership in Faculty of Education programs. At Lakehead University, the mandatory Aboriginal Education course has been lengthened from 18 to 36 contact hours in the new two-year teacher education program. Other forms of support can include additional funds and cooperation to support field trips for community, and place-based learning opportunities that create further learning spaces that include Indigenous language and cultural teachers outside of the classroom. As new courses and initiatives continue to develop in initial teacher education programs across Canada, a look at the ways that instructors proceed provides insight into the strategies, practices, and approaches that have been developed, practiced, and identified as being useful. The use of story, land, art, and reflection provided in this paper are in no way an exhaustive list of possible pedagogical strategies. As suggested by instructors, Indigenous Education courses can and should always look at ways of expanding and strengthening their role in initial teacher education.

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Note

- 1 Indigenous Education is capitalized as it is in reference to courses in teacher education programs.

Dr. Melissa Oskineegish is a recent graduate of the Joint PhD program in Educational Studies at Lakehead University whose dissertation examined the role of self-reflective practices in a mandatory Indigenous education course in teacher education. Prior to her graduate studies, she began her teaching career in a northern First Nation community where she was mentored by experienced educators who provided her with guidance on developing curriculum and pedagogical practices that were relevant and meaningful to the students she taught—an aim that influences her current work within Indigenous education research.